DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 125 SP 040 504

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TITLE Teacher Mentoring as Professional Development. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-SP-2001-4
PUB DATE 2001-11-00
NOTE 4p.
CONTRACT ED-99-CO-0007
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1307 New York Ave., N.W., Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005-4701. Tel: 202-293-2450; Tel: 800-822-9229 (Toll Free); e-mail: query@aacte.org. For full text: http://www.ericsp.org.
PUB TYPE ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Teacher Induction; Elementary Secondary Education; *Faculty Development; Instructional Leadership; *Mentors; Reflective Teaching; Self Efficacy; Teacher Collaboration; Teacher Competencies; Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests; Teacher Renewal

ABSTRACT

Teacher mentoring programs have increased dramatically since the early 1980s as a vehicle to support and retain novice teachers. However, researchers and facilitators of mentoring programs are recognizing that mentors also derive substantial benefits from the mentoring experience. This digest examines research on how mentoring contributes to the ongoing professional development of experienced teachers. Benefits to mentors include improved professional competency, increased reflective practice, teacher renewal, enhanced self-esteem, improved teacher collaboration, and development of teacher leadership. Working with new teachers can also lead mentors to participate in university research projects or teacher research. The benefits of mentoring programs have important implications for funding decisions made by administrators and staff development personnel. Principals must understand that creating a structure that allows experienced teachers to work with novice teachers will ultimately benefit the students, and the overall organization will be stronger as a result of the increased capacity of teachers serving as mentors. Staff developers should embrace mentoring programs not only as a valuable resource for beginning teachers, but also as a growth-promoting experience for mentors. (Contains 23 references.) (SM)

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ED 460 125

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November 2001

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November 2001 EDO-SP-2001-4

Teacher Mentoring as Professional Development

Leslie Huling and Virginia Resta

Teacher mentoring programs have dramatically increased since the early 1980s as a vehicle to support and retain novice teachers. The vast majority of what has been written about mentoring has focused on what mentors should believe and do in their work with novice teachers. The professional literature typically describes the benefits for novice teachers (Odell and Huling, 2000). However, facilitators of mentoring programs and researchers are recognizing that mentors also derive substantial benefits from the mentoring experience (Resta, Huling, White and Matschek, 1997; David, 2000; Holloway, 2001). The professional development benefits of the mentoring experience for the mentor teacher are the focus of this digest.

The idea that mentors derive benefits from mentoring is not completely new. As early as the mid-1980s, a few educators were beginning to examine this question. For example, in a 1986 study of 178 mentor teachers, more than two-thirds responded "definitely" to the statement that participation in the mentoring programs "provided positive professional growth for me" (Hawk, 1986-87, p. 62). When mentors were asked to elaborate upon the ways they grew professionally, more than half of them (N=91) did so with responses falling into three categories: (1) forced me to focus on and improve my own classroom teaching skills; (2) made me aware of the need for educators to communicate with each other; and (3) helped me better understand the principal and central office supervisors' roles. These findings led Hawk to conclude that "educators should look not only at the direct effects that teacher induction programs have on beginning teachers, but also at residual effects that such programs have on all involved professionals" (Hawk, 1986-87, p. 62).

Since 1986, only a few studies have focused on the primary question of mentor benefits, but a considerable number of researchers and mentor program evaluators have reported mentor benefits in the realm of unanticipated or secondary positive effects. This body of work will be briefly examined in a broader discussion of how mentoring contributes to the ongoing professional development of experienced educators.

Mentor Benefits

Professional competency. As mentor teachers assist their protégées in improving their teaching, they also improve their own professional competency. Several studies have documented the positive effects of mentoring on the mentors themselves (Gordon and Maxey, 2000). The quality of teaching by mentors improves (Yosha, 1991). Mentors benefit by applying cognitive coaching skills with their students such as listening, asking inquisitive questions, providing non-judgmental feedback, and by reassessing their classroom management (Clinard and Ariav, 1998). Mentor teachers frequently characterize working closely with beginning teachers as a source of new ideas about curriculum and teaching (Ganser, 1997). In a study of 542 mentors in New York City, mentors reported that their interns helped them by giving them feedback on demonstrations and by sharing literature, teaching techniques, curriculum, and lesson plans (Mei, 1993).

Reflective Practice. Mentors report that mentoring has forced them to be reflective about their own beliefs about teaching, students, learning, and teaching as a career. It also provided them with opportunities to validate the experience they have gained over the years (Ganser, 1997). Mentors find that just as teachers learn more about their subject by teaching, so analyzing and talking about teaching is a natural opportunity to deepen teaching sensitivity and skill (Tomlinson, 1995). Critically reflective mentors find that they are more focused in their mentoring relationships; they bring expanded energy, take more informed action, and are generally more satisfied with their mentoring relationships. Reflective practice in mentoring can also provide an opportunity for renewal and regeneration necessary for all adults. The drive toward generativity is an essential antidote to the threat of stagnation in the adult years (Daloz, 1999; Stevens, 1995).

Renewal. A number of researchers have reported that mentors experience professional renewal, are re-energized, and often strengthen their commitment to the teaching profession (Ford and Parsons, 2000; Steffey, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz, 2000).

Psychological Benefits. The benefits of mentoring are both career-related and psychological. Mentoring enhances mentors' self-esteem (Wollman-Bonilla, 1997). The experience of mentoring empowers experienced teachers and gives them a greater sense of significance in their world (Carger, 1996). Mentors derive satisfaction from helping less experienced colleagues (Scott, 1999). Mentors frequently describe their mentoring contribution as a way of giving back to the teaching profession (Boreen, Johnson, Niday and Potts, 2000).

Collaboration. Mentors report that continued contact with mentees provides some of their richest collegial interactions (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, and Potts, 2000). A number of researchers have noted the growth of veteran teachers' self-esteem as they engage in mentoring (Ford, and Parsons, 2000; Mei, 1993; Scott, 1999). Interviews with urban mentor teachers revealed that they felt a sense of increased confidence and maturity in dealing with other adults, a more clearly defined set of beliefs about teaching and curriculum, and more objectivity in reflecting on their own teaching as a result of mentoring (Freiberg, Zbikowski, and Ganser, 1996).

Contributions to Teacher Leadership. Mentor training and experiences can build mentors' capacity for leadership through structured professional development including training and experience in classroom observation and coaching skills. Mentors become recognized for their valuable knowledge and expertise in these areas and are sought out for various campus and district leadership roles. It is not uncommon for mentors to move into leadership positions as a result of their success as mentors, and it is often the case that they are more effective in these new positions because of the training and insights they received as mentors. For example, Freiberg found that at the end of their tenure as mentors, 100 percent of the mentors in her study were offered unsolic-

ited positions as a result of their experience in the mentoring program, and the positions offered provided opportunities to build on what they had learned as mentors or combined elements of mentoring and teaching (Freiberg, Zbikowski and Ganzer, 1996).

Mentoring Combined with Inquiry. Working with new teachers can lead mentors to participate in university research projects or teacher research. Mentors who participate in inquiry critically examine their own practice, which can lead to a heightened awareness of the complexity of teaching (Stanulis and Weaver, 1998).

Implications for Administrators

The benefits of mentoring programs are substantial for both novice and mentor teachers. This reality has important implications for funding decisions made by administrators and staff development personnel. Principals need to understand that creating a structure that allows experienced teachers to work with novice teachers will ultimately benefit the students of both novices and mentors, and the overall organization will be stronger as a result of the increased capacity of teachers serving as mentors. As staff developers grow in their understanding of comprehensive professional development that extends well beyond training workshops, they can begin to embrace mentoring programs not only as a valuable resource for novice teachers, but also as a growth-promoting experience for mentors as well. When administrators grapple with funding decisions related to mentoring programs, they need to recognize the dual benefits of their investments. Finally, because mentors can exert substantially greater influence on the school organization than novices, the benefits mentors derive from mentoring may be of equal, or even greater, importance than those experienced by novice teachers.

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under contract number ED-99-CO-0007. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of or policies of the U. S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U. S. Government.